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Letter to the Editor

STUDIES SHOW LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS CAN IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

There has been a lot of misinformation circulating in the media and in various public debates recently that would have us believe there is no research linking local school boards with improved student achievement.

On the contrary, studies across the United States consistently show that disadvantaged students have higher average test scores in smaller schools AND in smaller school districts.

In 1994, for example, the National Assessment of Education Progress found mathematics scores were better where schools and districts were smaller. Research done in 2000 in six different states concluded that the negative impact of poverty on academic performance was reduced dramatically in smaller school districts. And a recent study conducted in more affluent communities determined that large school districts had an adverse impact on academic performance for all socio-economic levels of students.

This is but a sampling of the findings of more than a dozen studies. They all conclude that smaller is better.

The consistent theme in all these studies is that parents feel alienated in large school districts, which is why Governor Lingle has proposed a constitutional amendment establishing at least seven local school boards. These boards would give parents, students and teachers on each island an opportunity to participate in decisions affecting their future.

But this will not happen if the existing Department of Education remains in place. The Education Commission of the United States concluded that not a single large school system has proven capable of fully transforming itself. This is particularly true in Hawai'i, where, in the words of noted education specialist Dr. Libby Oshiyama, we have "the most hidebound, calcified and controlling system in the United States."

Governor's Lingle's proposal for local school boards is more than an idea with great intuitive appeal. It is an idea that will help our students succeed. We hope the Legislature will listen to the will of the people and take another look at this proposal.

Put the Governor's constitutional amendment on the ballot, along with the other amendments being suggested for the November election. We have faith in the voters to make the best choice.

Linda L. Smith
Senior Policy Advisor
Office of the Governor